

Governors of Utah

From the Journal of Andrew Fjeld

Utah has been ruled under four Governments: Ecclesiastical in its first years, Provisional, Territorial and State.

Ecclesiastical

After leading the original Pioneers into the valley, Brigham Young remained but a short time before going back to Winter Quarters where he remained during the winter. Before leaving the valley he organized a High Council with Uncle John Smith as Stake President. Uncle John was on the plains and had not arrived in the valley when this action was taken.

On his arrival, Uncle John, as he was generally called, immediately assumed his duties as the presiding authority of the little fast growing colony in the valley.

During the Winter of 1847 and 8, all matters civil, religious, or otherwise were handled in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, by this High Council with Uncle John Smith at the head.

On his second trip across the plains, Brigham Young led a company consisting of over six hundred wagons and nearly two thousand souls, with their accompanying goods and chattels. He arrived in the valley in September 1848.

When Brigham Young came into the valley this time he came as the duly chosen President of the Church with Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards as his Counselors. He now presided over all matters in the valley as well as the whole western region. This form of government continued up until the 12th of March, 1849. A period of one year and eight months.

Provisional

In February 1849, a call was issued for a political convention. The people residing within the territory bounded by the Rocky Mountains, the Republic of Mexico, and Sierra Nevada Mountains and the Territory of Oregon, were invited to assemble at Great Salt Lake City, March 5, 1849.

On that date a convention was held, and Congress was petitioned to organize the State of Deseret. A constitution was adopted and a provisional government was set up. An election was held on the 12th of March, 1849, and Brigham Young was elected as the Governor of the State of Deseret.

Brigham Young now assumed the duties of Governor of the provisional State of Deseret appointing the necessary officers and doing all other duties pertaining to his office. This form of government continued until April 5, 1851. A period of two years and one month.

Territorial

In September 1850, Congress passed a bill for the organization of the Territory of Utah and not Deseret, and with the boundaries very much restricted, Brigham Young was appointed as Governor by President Millard Fillmore.

However, because of the primitive methods of transportation and sending of news, Brigham Young was not aware of his appointment until January 27, 1851 (4 months later) and then the news was brought by way of California. The provisional government was merged into the Territorial form April 5, 1851. The first territorial election was held in August, 1851. Thus, the Territory of Utah was started on its hectic career of 45 years.

Brigham Young, First Governor of Utah (Territory)

Under the appointment of Millard Fillmore, Brigham Young acted as the governor of Utah from April 5, 1851 to July 11, 1857, a period of 6 years and 3 months. At the end of his first term a petition was signed by the Mormons and the Gentiles for his reappointment, but before the end of the second term an army was sent to quell a rebellion in Utah, the sentiment of the country had so changed.

Alfred Cummings, Second Governor of Utah (Territory)

The second governor of Utah came with Johnston's army and spent the winter with them at Fort Bridger. Through the persuasion of Colonel Thomas L. Kane, a staunch friend of the Mormons, Governor Cummings entered Utah unescorted, except by two servants, in May 1858, when the "move" was in full swing. His wife was much upset when she learned the reason for this drastic action

and appealed to her husband to do something about it. He replied that he would do all that he could.

He proved to be a fair minded man and did much to bring about an understanding between the Government at Washington and the Mormons. His term of office extended from July 11, 1857, to May 1861. A period of 3 yrs, 9 months.

Two Acting Governors

Before Cummings successor arrived, Utah was governed by two Acting Governors, Francis H. Wooten and Frank Fuller, who each served for about three months.

John Dawson, Third Governor of Utah (Territory)

John Dawson was appointed Governor of Utah by Abraham Lincoln. He was a native of Indiana. He soon became very hostile to the Mormons and being a low principled man, he soon made himself so unpopular that he hurriedly left the territory 21 days after his arrival. On the way through the mountains he was waylaid by outlaws, robbed and beaten almost to death. His term of office extended from December 10 to December 31, 1861-in all 21 days.

Acting Governor

Frank Fuller again became Acting Governor and being a fair minded man he made a very considerate governor treating all parties with equal consideration. He served from January 1, 1862 to July 7, 1862, or 6 months.

Stephen S. Harding, Fourth Governor of Utah (Territory)

The fourth governor of Utah was Stephen S. Harding, a man of learning and eloquence, but hostile to the people whom he was sent to govern. He arrived in Utah July 7, 1862, and remained only about eleven months.

He left Utah July 11, 1863, by request.

During the above administration, Fort Douglas was founded by Colonel Patrick Edward Connor with a troop of California and Nevada volunteers, September 22, 1862.

James Duane Doty, Fifth Governor of Utah (Territory)

James Duane Doty was a conservative tolerant, liberal minded man and made a very good governor. He was loved and respected by all. He died in Salt Lake City June 13, 1865. He was governor about 2 years.

Acting Governor

During the interval between the death of Governor Doty and the arrival of his successor September 30, 1865, Amos Reid was named as Acting Governor. His father, at one time came to the help of Joseph Smith in a lawsuit in which his enemies were trying to put him to a lot of trouble. Amos Reid was very fine governor during the three months of his activities.

Charles Durkee, Sixth Governor of Utah (Territory)

Charles Durkee, the sixth Governor of Utah arrived in Salt Lake City, September 30, 1865. He received a cordial welcome from the people of Utah and proved himself worthy of their confidence.

Many stirring events took place during Durkee's administration. The boundaries of Utah, fixed as at present, Black Hawk War, Grass-hopper wars, Z.C.M.I. established in 1868, and arrival of the Railroad in 1869. Governor Durkee left Utah on account of ill health November 1868, in office 3 yrs 11 months. Governor Durkee died on his way home January 4, 1870.

Acting Governor

Edmund Higgins served as Acting Governor from late in 1868, until December 21 1869, when Governor Durkee's term expired, and until April 27, 1870 when S.A. Mann was appointed, altogether they served about five months.

J. Wilson Shaffer, Seventh Governor of Utah (Territory)

J. Wilson Shaffer was sent to Utah to carry out a preconceived plan against the Mormons. He was appointed by U.S. Grant.

Some time before Vice President Schuyler Colfax, a bitter anti-Mormon, had visited Utah and had helped to formulate a plan to destroy the Church. He had influenced President U.S. Grant which paved the way to carry out the plans of the members of the anti-Mormon ring in Utah and Governor Shaffer had been selected to carry out this policy. He was suffering with an incurable disease when he came but felt that it was his duty to inaugurate a plan of trouble and turmoil. He died October 31, 1870, as his term of office began in March, he only served for eight months, but his policies continued for many years.

Vernon H. Vaughn, Eighth Governor of Utah (Territory)

The day following the death of Governor Shaffer a telegram came from Washington D.C. announcing the appointment of Governor H. Vaughn as Governor and George A. Black as secretary.

As Mr. Vaughn had acted as secretary under Governor Shaffer, he was already in Utah and thus was ready to take over the office as Governor at once. He continued in office until February 19, 1871, Four months. He did nothing to upset anybody.

Acting Governor George A. Black

George A. Black served as secretary to Governors Shaffer, Vaughn and Woods and served as acting-governor Vaughn until July 1871, or about 5 months. He was anti-Mormon and very much so. He would not allow Salt Lake City or Ogden to have soldiers in their parades on the 4th and 24th of July, 1871.

George L. Wood, Ninth Governor of Utah (Territory)

George L. Wood ruled in Utah as the ninth governor from July 1871 to December 28, 1874, a period of about 3 years and 6 months.

His acts in Utah were mostly of a character to create turmoil and to bring trouble to the people. He entered heart and soul into the Shaffer ring and was much disliked by a great majority of the people.

Samuel Beach Axtell, Tenth Governor of Utah (Territory)

Governor Samuel B. Axell was a lawyer, a politician, a jurist and an honorable gentleman. His term as governor was cut short to four months by the agitation set up by the members of the "Shaffer ring". He was transferred to the governorship of Arizona, to the great delight of the anti-Mormons. He was governor from February 2, 1875 to June 8, 1875, about four months.

George W. Emery, Eleventh Governor of Utah (Territory)

George W. Emery served as governor from 1875 to 1880, about 4 years 6 months. He followed a conservative course and dealt justly with all men. Governor Emery was a personal friend of U.S. Grant and upon his persuasion the President came to Utah and was disillusioned on a great many things. Emery County was named after the fair-minded governor, February 12, 1880.

Eli H. Murray, Twelfth Governor of Utah (Territory)

Governor Murray arrived in Salt Lake City for his first term February 29, 1880. He was removed from office by President Cleveland March 16, 1886, a period of 6 years and 1 month.

During the administration of this handsome, prejudiced, anti-Mormon, he did everything that he possibly could to annoy, to agitate and to embitter the great majority of the people. During this time there was the most bitter feelings between the Mormons and the Gentiles that there had ever been in Utah.

Grant died July 22, 1885. George U. Cannon was denied a seat in congress although in the election he was supported by an overwhelming majority of the voters. Cannon, 18, 568 votes; Campbell 1, 357 votes.

The Edmunds Law was passed and the anti-polygamy prosecutions and persecutions began in deadly earnest. Hundreds of the best citizens were sent to the penitentiary and trouble and turmoil was everywhere.

Caleb W. West, Thirteenth and Fifteenth Governor of the Territory of Utah

First term 1886-1889; Second term 1893-1895. He was the first and only governor who received a reappointment after having been once succeeded. In

1889, he was succeeded by Arthur L. Thomas, and in turn he succeeded Thomas for his second term in May 1893.

Caleb West was a fair-minded man who tried to administer justice to all classes and did much to bring about normal conditions in Utah.

He was anxious to pardon all offenders against the polygamy laws if they would promise to change their views on the matter. Governor West recommended to the Secretary of the Interior that Utah be made a state and aided very materially in bringing this about.

Arthur L. Thomas, Fourteenth Governor of Utah (Territory)

Arthur L. Thomas was appointed Secretary of the Territory of Utah in 1879 and filled that position longer than any other man in the history of the territory. At the expiration of Caleb West's first term, he became Governor of the Territory of Utah in 1889, serving until May, 1893, about 4 years.

During this administration many of the barriers between the Mormons and Gentile were removed.

The Liberal and People's parties were abandoned and the Democratic and Republican political parties were organized in Utah.

Governor Thomas was a friend of education and did much to help the cause.

At this time the Mormon Church passed the Manifesto abandoning the practice of Plural Marriage.

Caleb W. West, Fifteenth and last Governor Of the Territory of Utah, 1893-1895

Under the last term of Governor West the Salt Lake Temple was dedicated. The tabernacle choir sang in the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. All polygamists were pardoned by Grover Cleveland and restored to their civil rights. The state Constitutional Convention was held, constitution adopted and all things were shaping for the admission of Utah as a state in the Union.

Governor Heber J. Wells, First Governor of the State of Utah First and Second terms 1896-1904

The people of Utah waited long and anxiously for statehood. Many times it was refused to them, mostly for religious reasons.

March 4, 1895 a Constitutional Convention was held in Salt Lake City for the purpose of preparing a constitution for the new state when and if Utah was admitted into the Union.

The convention was in session sixty-six days. The Constitution was unanimously accepted by the people and on the afternoon of Saturday, January 4, 1896, the admission of Utah into the Union was proclaimed by President Grover Cleveland.

By previous arrangement a gun was fired when the news arrived in Salt Lake City and immediately pandemonium broke loose: sirens shrieked, whistles blew, bells rang and people generally went mad with joy.

Monday, January 6, 1896 was observed as a general holiday and the state government of Utah was inaugurated.

Heber M. Wells was installed as the first governor of the new state of Utah. The following have served as Governors: John C. Cutler, a humanitarian; William spry, a businessman and politician; Simon Bamberger, a Jew, signed prohibition; Charles R. Maby, political and military; George H. Dern, mining man, secretary of W.; Henry H. Blood, a public official, many; Herbert B. Maw, present incumbent, a very likeable fellow.